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Message Text

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ACTION NEA-11

INFO OCT-01 EUR-12 ISO-00 CIAE-00 DODE-00 PM-05 H-01
INR-10 L-03 NSAE-00 NSC-05 PA-01 SP-02 SS-15
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FM USINT BAGHDAD
TO SECSTATE WASHDC 6367
INFO AMEMBASSY DAMASCUS
AMEMBASSY JIDDA
AMEMBASSY KUWAIT
AMEMBASSY MOSCOW
AMEMBASSY TEHRAN

C O N F I D E N T I A L BAGHDAD 1295

E.O. 11652: GDS
TAGS: PEPR, IZ, UR, IR
SUBJECT: IRAQI/IRANIAN RELATIONS

REF: TEHRAN 5288 (NOTAL)

1. DURING HIS FAREWELL CALL (HE LEAVES ON ASSIGNMENT TO BONN FOLLOWING JULY 17 CELEBRATIONS), IRANIAN AMBASSADOR SADRIEH MADE A RATHER GUARDED REFERENCE TO THE SORT OF SECRET CONTACTS BETWEEN IRAQ AND IRAN MENTIONED REFTEL AND CURRENTLY BEING TOUTED IN INTERNATIONAL PRESS. HE PUT IT IN THE CONTEXT OF "DEPARTING JUST AS THINGS ARE BECOMING REALLY INTERESTING." HAVING INITIALLY RESISTED THE ASSIGNMENT, AND EXTRACTING A PROMISE THAT IT WOULD ONLY LAST 18 MONTHS (IT HAS), SADRIEH EVIDENTLY IS A LITTLE DISAPPOINTED THAT HIS SUCCESSOR WILL HAVE AN OPPORTUNITY TO WORK IN THE ENVIRONMENT OF TRULY CLOSE COOPERATION THAT IS YET TO BEGIN.

2. SADRIEH IS A VERY COMPETENT DIPLOMAT, HIGHLY REGARDED IN THIS ISOLATED DIPLOMATIC COMMUNITY BOTH FOR HIS
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ASTUTENESS AND FOR THE HIGH-LEVEL ACCESS TO THE GOI THAT SO FEW OF HIS COLLEAGUES ENJOY. THIS HAS IN PART BEEN A REFLECTION OF THE STEADILY-IMPROVING RELATIONS BETWEEN THE TWO COUNTRIES, BUT SADRIEH MADE IT CLEAR THAT RECENT DEVELOPMENTS IN THE GENERAL AREA HAVE HAD A GALVANIC EFFECT, TENDING TO PUSH IRAN AND IRAQ INTO FAR CLOSER COLLABORATION. SADRIEH CHOSE AS ILLUSTRATIONS

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OF THESE FACTORS THE DIFFERENCES BETWEEN IRAQ AND THE SOVIET UNION THAT HAVE RECENTLY EMERGED, THE COUP IN AFGHANISTAN, AND THE RECENT UNREST IN IRAN.

3. WITH REGARD TO THE LATTER, SADRIEH SAID THAT INITIALLY THE GOI GROSSLY OVERESTIMATED THE IMPORTANCE OF THE DISTURBANCES, AND CONSEQUENTLY WAS CONSIDERABLY CONCERNED OVER THE POSSIBLE IMPACT ON THE STABILITY OF THE SHAH'S GOVERNMENT. THIS CONCERN WAS FURTHER HEIGHTENED BY EVENTS IN AFGHANISTAN, WHICH HE SAID APPEARED TO THE IRAQIS TO HERALD A SOVIET PUSH SOUTHWESTERN THROUGH AN UNSTABLE IRAN TO THE GULF. HE EVIDENTLY BELIEVES THAT IRAQI FEARS CONCERNING IRAN'S FUTURE HAVE LARGELY BEEN ALLAYED IN THE PAST WEEKS, IF NOT REMOVED, BUT THE RESULT HAS BEEN HEIGHTENED AWARENESS OF A COMMUNITY OF INTERESTS. ALTHOUGH HE RESISTED MY EFFORTS TO OBTAIN MORE CONCRETE INFORMATION ON JUST WHAT IS GOING ON, SADRIEH DID LEAVE THE IMPRESSION THAT CONTACTS WERE FAR DEEPER AND BROADER THAN HE COULD HAVE REASONABLY EXPECTED AT THIS TIME.

4. IN SUBJSEQUENT CONVERSATION, IRANIAN COUNSELOR TREATED USINT POLOFF TO DESCRIPTION OF IRAQI-IRANIAN RELATIONS ALONG SAME LINE AS SADRIEH'S. BOTH MEN WERE VERY RELAXED ABOUT ROLE OF IRANIAN DISSIDENT
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AYATOLLA AL-KHOMEINI. COUNSELOR NOTED THAT, PARTLY TO PREVENT POLITICAL STIRRINGS IN ITS OWN SHIA POPULATION, IRAQ GREATLY RESTRICTED HIS ACTIVITIES AND QUIPPED "IT'S BETTER TO HAVE AL-KHOMEINI IN NAJAF THAN IN PARIS." COUNSELOR CAUTIONED THAT IRAQIS WERE "LIKE ALL ARABLS" VERY FICKLE AND INDICATED IRAN WAS SEEKING NEW WAYS TO REMIND IRAQIS OF DANGERS POSED BY SOVIET INFLUENCE IN THE AREA, FROM AFGHANISTAN TO ETHIOPIA.

5. COMMENT: IRAQ AND IRAN HAVE ALWAYS HAD A LOT OF VERY GOOD REASONS FOR SMOOTHING OVER THE SHARP DIFFERENCES IN THEIR BASIC POLICIES AND OBJECTIVES. THESE POSITIVE ASPECTS HAVE NOW BEEN HIGHLIGHTED BY FACTORS EXTERNAL TO THEIR BILATERAL RELATIONS. THE IRANIANS, WHO HAVE HAD THEIR OWN GOOD REASONS FOR CAREFULLY WATCHING ACTIVITIES OF COMMUNISTS IN THIS PART OF THE WORLD, HAVE SUDDENLY FOUND THAT IRAQI PERCEPTIONS OF THE PROBLEM HAVE VISIBLY ALTERED IN THE SAME GENERAL DIRECTION. FOR ITS PART, THE GOI MAY ALSO HAVE DECIDED THAT A SHAH ON THEIR BORDER IS BETTER THAN A SOVIET-DOMINATED OR CONTROLLED

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REGIME. AS RELATIONS WITH THE SOVIET UNION CONTINUE
TO DETERIORATE, FOR WHATEVER REASONS, MORE CORDIAL
DEALINGS WITH ALL ITS NEIGHBORS BECOME OF INCREASING
IMPORTANCE TO THE GOI. IF SYRIA IS AT THE
BOTTOM OF THE LIST, AS EVERYONE WILL AGREE, IRAN
IS MOST LIKELY AT THE TOP.
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